St. Francis de Sales and *Introduction to the Devout Life*

Holiness Is for Everyone

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> *"So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."*
> **Matthew 5:48 (NABRE)**

Throughout this series, we have been discovering that God calls every Christian to a life of holiness.

St. John of the Cross taught us that God lovingly purifies the soul through the Dark Night of the Soul.

St. Teresa of Ávila invited us into the Interior Castle, where the Blessed Trinity dwells within every faithful soul.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux showed us that extraordinary holiness is found through ordinary acts performed with extraordinary love.

At this point, another important question naturally arises.

Is the call to holiness meant only for priests, monks, nuns, and mystics, or is it truly meant for everyone?

The answer comes from one of the Church's most practical spiritual teachers, **St. Francis de Sales**.

His answer was both simple and revolutionary.

Holiness is for everyone.

A Saint Ahead of His Time

Born in France in 1567, St. Francis de Sales served as Bishop of Geneva during one of the most difficult periods in Church history. The Protestant Reformation had divided much of Europe, and many Catholics struggled to understand their faith.

Rather than responding with anger or harshness, Francis became known for his gentleness, patience, and extraordinary charity.

He once wrote:

"You catch more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a barrel of vinegar."

Although the saying is simple, it reflects the way he approached every person.

He believed truth should always be spoken with love.

His kindness won thousands back to the Catholic faith.

Yet perhaps his greatest contribution was not as a bishop.

It was as a spiritual guide.

A Book Written for Ordinary Christians

Until the time of St. Francis de Sales, many people believed that deep spirituality belonged primarily to monks, nuns, and priests.

Lay people were expected simply to attend Mass, obey the commandments, and support the Church.

Francis challenged that way of thinking.

He wrote one of the most influential books in Christian history, **Introduction to the Devout Life**, specifically for people living ordinary lives.

He wrote for husbands and wives.

For merchants.

For soldiers.

For farmers.

For mothers and fathers.

For laborers.

For public officials.

For every baptized Christian.

He boldly declared that holiness is not reserved for the few.

It is the vocation of all.

Bloom Where God Has Planted You

One of St. Francis de Sales' most beautiful teachings is that we should seek holiness exactly where God has placed us.

A parent does not become holy by neglecting children in order to pray all day.

A business owner does not become holy by abandoning responsibilities.

A student does not become holy by ignoring studies.

Instead, holiness grows through faithfully fulfilling the duties God has entrusted to us.

Each vocation has its own path to sanctity.

The faithful husband.

The loving wife.

The honest employee.

The compassionate physician.

The dedicated teacher.

The retired grandparent who faithfully prays for the family.

Each can become a saint.

God has planted every one of us in a particular place.

Our task is to bloom where He has planted us.

As Saint Paul reminds us:

> *"Whatever you do, do from the heart, as for the Lord and not for others."*
> **Colossians 3:23 (NABRE)**

Holiness in Daily Life

St. Francis believed that every ordinary responsibility could become an act of worship.

Preparing meals.

Going to work.

Paying bills.

Caring for aging parents.

Helping neighbors.

Serving in the parish.

Speaking kindly to strangers.

Driving patiently through traffic.

Every action can become a prayer when it is performed with love for God.

Many people imagine holiness requires dramatic sacrifices.

Francis reminds us that holiness often grows quietly.

One honest decision.

One kind word.

One act of forgiveness.

One prayer.

One faithful day after another.

This is how saints are formed.

The Virtue of Gentleness

If there is one virtue especially associated with St. Francis de Sales, it is gentleness.

He understood that harsh words often harden hearts.

Gentleness opens them.

This begins with how we treat others.

It also includes how we treat ourselves.

Many sincere Christians become discouraged after falling into sin.

Francis encouraged them not to surrender to despair.

Instead, they should rise, seek God's mercy, and begin again.

He wrote:

> *"Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself."*

This does not excuse sin.

Rather, it reminds us that spiritual growth takes time.

God is patient with us.

We should learn to be patient as He continues His work within us.

Living in the Presence of God

St. Francis encouraged Christians to remember God's presence throughout the day.

Prayer should not be limited to Sunday worship or morning devotions.

God walks with us constantly.

He is present in our work.

He is present in our homes.

He is present during times of joy and times of sorrow.

Even brief prayers offered throughout the day draw the soul closer to Him.

A simple "Lord, guide me."

A quiet "Thank You."

A heartfelt "Jesus, I trust in You."

These moments remind us that every hour belongs to God.

As Scripture teaches:

> *"Pray without ceasing."*
> **1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NABRE)**

Holiness Changes the World

St. Francis de Sales understood that the world's greatest need is not simply more information.

It is more holy people.

A holy father influences his children.

A holy mother strengthens her family.

A holy teacher shapes future generations.

A holy employer treats workers with dignity.

A holy employee works with integrity.

A holy priest leads souls toward Christ.

Holiness spreads quietly.

Like light entering a dark room, it changes everything it touches.

The transformation of society always begins with the transformation of individual hearts.

The Celtic Catholic Priest's Reflection

One of the greatest misconceptions among Christians is the belief that holiness belongs only to extraordinary people.

Many believe they are too busy.

Too ordinary.

Too old.

Too young.

Too burdened by past mistakes.

St. Francis de Sales reminds us that God is not asking us to become someone else.

He is asking us to become the person He created us to be.

As a Celtic Catholic Priest, I have often met people who believed they had missed their opportunity to serve God. They looked at the saints and assumed their own lives could never measure up.

Yet holiness is not measured by fame.

It is measured by faithfulness.

When parents raise children with love, they are serving Christ.

When workers perform honest labor with integrity, they are serving Christ.

When neighbors care for one another, they are serving Christ.

When we forgive those who have wronged us, we become more like Christ.

Every ordinary day offers another opportunity to become a saint.

The path to heaven does not begin in a monastery.

It begins wherever God has placed us today.

> *"Be who you are and be that well, that you may bring honor to the Master Craftsman whose handiwork you are."*
> **— St. Francis de Sales**

Unless otherwise noted, all Sacred Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE), the English language translation approved for liturgical use by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.